

Poplar Place

The Poplar Place station area affords opportunities for neighborhood-scale, transit-oriented development. Infill commercial and residential development can help link the station area to the retail uses on Rainier Avenue South and the surrounding residential areas. Mixed use and pedestrian development can also help create opportunities for walking and transit use.

SOUND TRANSIT ALIGNMENT AND STATION OPTIONS

One of the four alignment options under consideration for the North Rainier neighborhood would locate a station at Poplar Place, east of Interstate 5 and south of Dearborn Street.

EXISTING STATION AREA CONDITIONS

LAND USE AND HOUSING

The Poplar station area is primarily auto-oriented, allowing for convenient travel between Downtown Seattle, the International District, Rainier Valley, and the Central District. The Interstate 90 and I-5 interchanges and Rainier Avenue South, a major north-south arterial, are located within the station area. With the exception of the International District core along Jackson Street and the stable residential areas to the east of Rainier Avenue, much of the station area is low-density or underdeveloped. Major land uses include vacant lots, institutions, and single-family homes.

Single-family land uses occupy over 14 acres of the station area, including a portion of the North Rainier neighborhood. The station area as a whole has an average net density of approximately 4.5 units per acre.



Looking southwest along Dearborn toward planting area adjacent to I-90.

TRANSPORTATION

The Poplar Place station is located immediately to the east of the I-90/I-5 interchange; right-of-way for these highways dominates the station area, particularly in the western and southern parts of the station area. The station area, in general, does not have a strong orientation to pedestrians or bicycles, but predominantly serves the automobile. Specific transportation characteristics of the station area include:

- *Highway Access.* Although the highway structures run through the station area, on-ramps and off-ramps are located in adjacent areas. South Dearborn Street, however, has an exit from I-5.
- *Auto Access to Adjacent Neighborhoods.* The configuration of the I-90/I-5 interchange allows automobile movement between the station area and neighborhoods to the west. South Dearborn Street and South Jackson Street provide east-west circulation. Twelfth Avenue South provides access northward to First Hill and Capitol Hill, and Golf Drive links to Beacon Hill. Rainier Avenue South is the main arterial spine of neighborhoods in the Rainier Valley.
- *Pedestrian Mobility.* The station area, in general, does not have a strong orientation to pedestrians or bicycles. South Rainier has auto-oriented commercial uses that make pedestrian activity difficult.

Poplar Place Station Area – Existing Conditions, 1997¹	
Population	725
Employment	2,400
Median Household Income (1996)	\$ 34,724
<i>Residential Land Use</i>	
Total Dwelling Units	302
Density ²	
Single-family Zones	8.1
Multi-family Zones	10.2
<i>Commercial Land Use</i>	
Total Floor Area (sq. ft.)	1,633,070
Retail/Service	45,100
Office	100,220
Floor Area Ratio (FAR) ³	0.56
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
² Dwelling units per net acre in specified residential zones. Residential units in non-residential and downtown zones are excluded.	
³ Ratio of non-residential space per net acre of commercial and industrial land use.	

Community Issues

The Poplar Place station is located at the southern end of the Central Neighborhood planning district. The *Central Area Action Plan, Phase II* proposes improvements that will help improve access and circulation for pedestrians and bicycles throughout the neighborhood. Specific policies include pedestrian and bicycle improvements on South Jackson Street (north of the Poplar station area).

1995 Metro Six-Year Plan

The I-90/Rainier Avenue South intersection functions as an important bus transfer station. King County's *1995 Six-Year Transit Development Plan* establishes 44 transit hubs throughout the Seattle region, including the I-90/Rainier Avenue South intersection, which are targeted for service and facility improvements depending on service routes and transit frequencies (Strategy C-1.)

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK

The station location is physically separated from the user population. Pedestrian access would require platforms and bridges from the adjacent neighborhoods to cross busy streets.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Both the Central Neighborhood and the North Rainier neighborhood (located south of I-90) cite the lack of open space as a major issue. The *North Rainier Neighborhood Planning Report, Phase I* calls for upgrading existing parks and developing pocket parks and P-patches, improving park lighting and maintenance, and expanding existing schools as community facilities.

URBAN DESIGN FEATURES

The Poplar station area is characterized by the Interstate overpass and on- and off-ramps, low-density commercial and light industrial uses interspersed with vacant lots. The *North Rainier Neighborhood Planning Report* lists several urban design issues relevant to the area, including graffiti and litter control, the prevalence of strip malls, lack of open and green spaces, deteriorated public buildings, and the need for street trees along Rainier Avenue and MLK, Jr. Way.

The *Report* proposes the following: to adopt specific neighborhood design guidelines and review standards; increase Good Neighbor funds for facade improvements; establish an Adopt-a-Street program; create a neighborhood cleanup program; publicize successful projects to dispel negative images; and establish a ground-based pedestrian connection across Rainier Avenue and MLK, Jr. Way. The Central Neighborhood also cites open space and pedestrian links as key urban design concerns.

Visual Landmarks

The highway overpass is a major visual landmark in the Poplar station area.

Views

Views along Dearborn Street are characterized by the Jose Rizal Bridge (12th Avenue) which connects the International District to the north side of Beacon Hill. Both the Kingdome and new football stadium will be visible from the station location. Mount Rainier also is visible at certain points, including along Rainier Avenue South.

RECENT MARKET TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

MARKET CONDITIONS

The Poplar station area has relatively low rents for residential development and residential vacancy rates of approximately 6%, suggesting that there is currently low-rent housing available. However, recent trends in land prices suggest that housing prices and rents are increasing rapidly. While the area may be relatively affordable for housing, its affordability is attracting new residents and, therefore, increasing the value of properties. Although permit records show some market activity, there has been little commercial development overall in the station area.

Poplar Place Station Area – Market Conditions¹	
Rents and Vacancy Rates	
Apartment Rents (sq. ft.)	0.71
Apartment Vacancy Rate	6.0%
Office Rents (sq. ft.)	N/A
Office Vacancy Rate	N/A
Trends in Land Prices ²	
Commercial Lots	4.7%
Single Family Lots	7.3%
Multi-family Lots	9.3%
Active Permit Applications	
Housing Units	0
Commercial Space (sq. ft.)	9,000
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.	
² 1985-95 average annual increase, based on sales prices recorded by King County Assessor and reported by zone category.	

RECENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Potential opportunities for redevelopment in the Poplar station area include infill housing sites. Although few development projects have been approved for the station area, commercial and mixed-use development opportunities exist along Rainier Avenue South. The Dearborn/Hiawatha mixed use development project along South Dearborn Street will link the station area to the Central Area neighborhood.

RELATIVE STRENGTH OF DEVELOPMENT MARKETS IN THE POPLAR PLACE STATION AREA

Overall development potential for the Poplar Place station area is low. Low rents, residential vacancies of 6%, and slow commercial development suggest that the area does not have a strong market for residential, office, or retail development. Public actions, including redevelopment, may be necessary to stimulate the local market for future development.

Poplar Place Station Area – Relative Market Strength ¹	
	Ranking (5 high, 1 low)
Housing	1
Retail	1
Office	1
¹ Indicates relative strength of market type of station area, compared to other potential station areas. Ranking is based on rents, employment levels, vacancy rates, land values, recent development activity, stakeholder interviews, field observations, and other information.	

EXISTING PLANS AND ZONING

PLANNING CONTEXT

Portions of the Poplar Place station area are located within the International District Urban Center Village and the 23rd and Jackson-Union Residential Urban Village. A significant portion of this station area is occupied by Interstate 90 right-of-way and a corridor of commercial and industrial activity between Rainier Avenue and I-90. West of I-90, the station area includes a wooded slope toward Beacon Hill and the Pacific Medical Center.

ZONING

The wide variety of zones found in the Poplar Place station area do not appear to establish a

coherent planning direction for the area. Zoning designations in the station area include:

- *Commercial Areas.* Parcels along Rainier Avenue South are zoned for a variety of commercial uses, including auto-oriented uses. Commercial zones allow for heavier commercial activity and development that is more oriented to automobile travel than pedestrian access.
- *Multi-family Areas.* Low-rise multi-family residential uses are located behind commercial areas on Rainier Avenue South, as well as south of the I-90 right-of-way.
- *Industrial Areas.* The IC zone is intended to attract research and development uses and compatible industrial/commercial activity. Housing is prohibited.

Poplar Place Station Area – Potential Development Under Current Zoning Regulations¹		
	<i>Commercial (sq. ft.)</i>	<i>Residential (units)</i>
Existing Development	1,633,070	302
Additional Potential Development under Current Zoning Regulations ²	232,651	435
TOTAL	1,865,721	737
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
² Potential development capacity is based on City of Seattle GIS database and Scenario 2 in the “Zoned Development Capacity” background paper.		

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN ISSUES

The neighborhood planning group is beginning to address station area planning issues. Sixty-nine percent of the residents are either somewhat familiar or very familiar with Sound Transit’s plans, and the neighborhood’s highest planning priority is to work with Sound Transit. Key issues of concern include:

- Improving neighborhood image to promote economic development.
- Station access (transit to the station, parking, pedestrian and bicycle accessibility).
- Land assembly for redevelopment.
- Public safety.

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

The neighborhood around the Poplar Place station is interested in using the station area to expand opportunities for community revitalization and improvements. The Central Area community has expressed concerns primarily about affordable housing, parking, pedestrian circulation, and community facilities. Specific comments include:

- *Community Facilities.* “The area around the Poplar Place station has no traditional neigh-

neighborhood amenities and needs parks, storefront police stations, and community facilities.”

- *Pedestrian Network.* “The station area should be well-lit, pedestrian-friendly, and should not appear institutional.” “There should be street improvements in the station areas; sidewalks, trees, lighting.”
- *Parking Management.* “We will need parking management strategies in the station area. There should be a limit on commuter parking in the neighborhood through the use of RPZs and stricter enforcement.”

STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY SITES

The Poplar Place station area has 126 parcels comprising over 17 acres of land available for development. These represent vacant parcels, as well as select parcels that can potentially be increased in density.

Poplar Place Station Area – Opportunity Sites by Zoning Designation¹		
	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage²</i>
L-3	8	0.76
SF 5000	12	1.44
L-1	35	4.21
L-3.RC	1	0.21
LDT	19	2.19
L-2	20	2.48
C1-40	12	1.40
C2-40	2	0.32
IC-65	17	4.33
TOTAL	126	17.34
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.		
² Based on City of Seattle GIS database.		

Zoning for Opportunity Sites

Nearly all opportunity sites are found in L1 and L2 zones, which allow for low-rise multi-family residential development. While development in these sites could increase overall densities for the station area, they are located on the other side of I-90 or Rainier Avenue South, and their development would not necessarily be directly supportive of the light rail station.

Opportunity sites closest to the station include the 17 parcels found in the IC-65 District; they

total up to more than four acres. The IC zone allows light and general manufacturing, as well as heavy manufacturing with an administrative conditional use permit, and auto-oriented commercial uses like fast-food restaurants and auto sales and service. More transit-supportive policies would be necessary for appropriate development around the station.

DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

Major constraints to transit-oriented development in the Poplar station area related mostly to the existing site configuration. Interstate 90 and Rainier Avenue South both carry heavy traffic, and any development in their vicinity will have to cope with the negative impacts of noise, fumes, and traffic congestion.

Another potential constraint to development in the station area is the small size of residential and commercial land parcels (most in the range of 0.10 to 0.15 acres). It is uncertain whether the local real estate market can support small-scale infill development.

Existing zoning constrains the potential for transit-supportive development. Although mixed use is allowed in C zones (but is allowed only as a conditional use in C2 zones), multi-family residential zones do not permit mixed use development. Moreover, the commercial zones tend to favor large-scale, auto-oriented development. Potential new development in the station area, therefore, will not be likely to create improved conditions for pedestrian activity.

STATION AREA FORECASTS

Three different forecasts were developed for the new population, employment, dwelling units, and commercial floor area that will be added to the station area by 2020:

1. “Without light rail transit;”
2. “With light rail transit, but without supportive land use policies;” and
3. “With both light rail transit *and* supportive land use policies.”

POPULATION AND HOUSING

The PSRC forecast projects an additional 101 dwelling units in the Poplar station area, whereas the *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts 92 new units. Current demand for housing in this area is relatively weak, but in-fill housing will likely redevelop given the proximity to Downtown. Thus, the baseline forecast for new housing is for 100 units over the next 20 years, with 165 residents. Since most of the opportunity sites for new development are on the northern edge of the station area and have poor pedestrian connections to the station site, the station area will add 105 units by 2020 with “light rail only.”

EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL FLOOR AREA

The City and PSRC forecasts are very similar in their estimate of new commercial floor area over the next twenty years, so the mid-point of 80,000 square feet of commercial space was selected.

LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL

The land use impacts of “rail without supportive policies” will likely be a minimal increase in housing and commercial uses within the station area. New development is unlikely to be located around the light rail station because of the proximity to Interstate 90. The topography of the station area (i.e., with steep slopes to the northwest and south of the station) constrains the opportunities for more intensive development.

LAND USE IMPACTS OF LIGHT RAIL WITH SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

The potential development strategies for the Poplar station area focus on providing incentives in the zoning code for mixed use transit-oriented development and improving pedestrian linkages. The station area is in a relatively weak market area, with few sites for development near the station. Supportive policies would have a small effect on development in this area, boosting the number of new dwelling units to 190 and the new commercial floor area to 90,000 square feet.

Poplar Station Area – Market Forecasts, 1997-2020¹				
	<u>1997</u>	<u>1997-2020 Growth</u>		
		<i>Without LRT</i>	<i>With LRT Only</i>	<i>LRT and Supportive Policies</i>
Population	725	150	165	285
Dwelling Units	302	100	110	190
Employment	2400	270	280	300
Commercial Floor Area ²	1633	80	84	90

¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.

² Square footage (in thousands); includes commercial, industrial and institutional space, but excludes Sound Transit facilities and public facilities.

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Potential development strategies for the Poplar Place station area are primarily intended to provide improved pedestrian and transit connections to the adjacent neighborhoods. This approach is consistent with the station area’s existing land uses and character as a travel corridor to Downtown employment and retail. Increasing density is not seen as a key strategy in this station area, although incentives for higher density development in the station area may be useful for integrating the station with the surrounding neighborhood. The overall development strategies for the Poplar station area can be summarized as follows:

- *Connections to the Commercial Core.* Incentives can be offered for transit-oriented development near the station, so that development clusters around the station and links the station to the adjacent commercial area and the Dearborn-Hiawatha project.
- *Parking Management.* Strategies can balance the parking needs of light rail commuters with those of shoppers at nearby commercial areas. Shared parking may be a possibility, and may encourage commuters to patronize local commercial establishments.

*Background Report for Light Rail Station Area Planning in Seattle:
Existing Conditions and Future Prospects for Transit-Oriented Development*

- *Affordable Housing.* The Mayor has proposed multi-family property tax abatement program for new or substantial rehabilitation projects in this area.

The table of potential development strategies shows high priority and recommended actions. It is uncertain whether development partnerships will be necessary or desirable, although the City can work with local Community Development Corporations and businesses to ensure a strong connection between the light rail station and the neighborhood commercial node.

Potential Development Strategies: Poplar (20)

Strategy	Potential Action	Comments
Land Use Tools	○	<i>Establish limitations on auto-oriented uses along Rainier Avenue and S. Dearborn St. Offer density bonuses for TOD.</i>
Pedestrian Network	○	<i>Improve pedestrian linkages to adjacent neighborhoods; establish a pedestrian overlay zone on Rainier Avenue and on 12th from S. Jackson to the station; provide improvements on Dearborn.</i>
Parking Management	○	<i>Address business and short-term parking needs.</i>
Economics/Financial Assistance	✓	<i>Establish or support existing CDCs to help finance local businesses; provide support for affordable housing in L-3 zones.</i>
Regulatory Process	?	<i>Provide expedited review/SEPA clearance for TOD projects.</i>
Local Transit Service	●	<i>Provide feeder bus service to station and neighborhood circulator options.</i>
Development Partnerships	?	
Pilot Projects	✓	<i>Hiawatha Place</i>

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| ✓ = Supportive Policy/Program in Place | TOD = Transit-Oriented Development |
| ● = High Priority Action | POZ = Pedestrian Overlay Zone |
| ○ = Recommended Action | RPZ = Residential Parking Zone |
| ? = Further Study Required | |

Interstate-90

The two options for an Interstate-90 station area afford opportunities for neighborhood-scale transit-oriented development. Infill commercial and residential development can help link the station area to the retail uses on Rainier Avenue South and the surrounding residential areas. Mixed use and pedestrian development can also help create the opportunities for walking and transit use.

The largest barrier to effective transit-supportive development in the station area options is the Interstate right-of-way, which creates a strong visual and physical barrier in the neighborhood. The urban design and land use mix in the neighborhood can be improved by addressing the presence of the highway and improving pedestrian access to the light rail station.

SOUND TRANSIT ALIGNMENT AND STATION OPTIONS

Of the four alignment options being considered for the North Rainier neighborhood, two include a station at the I-90/Rainier Avenue South interchange. The proposed station may be located in one of two potential sites:

On Rainier Avenue. This site is located beneath I-90 where it crosses Rainier Avenue.

South of I-90. This site is located along the regional trail south and adjacent to I-90. A light rail station at this point would be accessible to users coming from Rainier Avenue and to neighborhood users via street-end trail connections.



Adjacent to Interstate 90 is a regional multi-use trail connecting Seattle with the east side of Lake Washington. This is the location of Station 28.

EXISTING STATION AREA CONDITIONS

LAND USE AND HOUSING

Single-family residential and vacant lots are the predominant land uses in the I-90 station area options, suggesting that the area is generally low-density and underdeveloped. Single-family residences are found both to the northeast of the station sites in the Judkins Park neighborhood, as well as to the southwest of the station locations in the Rainier Valley residential neighborhood. Retail uses along Rainier Avenue occupy a relatively small number of acres in either station area option.

Residential uses in the two alternative station areas have approximately the same average net densities. However, the station located at 17th Avenue South has slightly higher densities (ranging between 5 and 11 units per acre), suggesting that multi-family residential development in the neighborhood south of I-90 may be more compact. In Rainier Avenue station, residential densities range between 5 and 9 units per acre.

I-90 Station Areas – Existing Conditions, 1997¹		
	<i>Rainier Avenue</i>	<i>South of I-90</i>
Population	881	1,122
Employment	784	770
Median Household Income (1996)	\$ 34,724	\$ 34,724
<i>Residential Land Use</i>		
Total Dwelling Units	357	473
Density ²		
Single-family Zones	4.9	5.6
Multi-family Zones	8.6	10.9
<i>Commercial Land Use</i>		
Total Floor Area (sq. ft.)	326,134	415,701
Retail/Service	38,788	36,782
Office	94,478	118,828
Floor Area Ratio (FAR) ³	0.14	0.17
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
² Dwelling units per net acre in specified residential zones. Residential units in non-residential and downtown zones are excluded.		
³ Ratio of non-residential space per net acre of commercial and industrial land use.		

TRANSPORTATION

The I-90 station options are located at the intersection of Rainier Avenue South and I-90, which dominates the station area. In general, the station areas do not have a strong orientation to pedestrians or bicycles, but predominantly serve the automobile. Specific transportation characteristics of the optional station areas include:

- *Highway Access.* On-ramps and off-ramps are located at Rainier Avenue South, providing access to Downtown and to suburban areas to the east.
- *Auto Access to Adjacent Neighborhoods.* Interstate 5 impedes movement between the station area north of the highway and areas to the west, although South Massachusetts Street provides access westward to SODO. Rainier Avenue South, 23rd Avenue South, and 17th Avenue South provide automobile movement in the north-south direction.
- *Transit Access.* Buses from the Eastside stop in the station area (the current transfer point is located underneath the I-90 highway overpass along Rainier Avenue South), providing linkages to Downtown.
- *Pedestrian Mobility.* Rainier Avenue South is developed with auto-oriented commercial uses that make pedestrian activity difficult.

Community Issues

The *North Rainier Neighborhood Planning Report Phase I* approaches transportation planning by examining the needs for access. A priority is to “increase accessibility to other parts of the neighborhood and city.” To this end, the plan addresses accessibility by a variety of modes. Improved transit and pedestrian connections are considered key, but the plan also addresses issues concerning automotive travel, such as traffic congestion and parking. Specific issues of concern include:

- *Transit Connections.* Need for local transit connections to the light rail station.
- *Pedestrian Safety and Comfort.* Issues include unsafe pedestrian crossings (Rainier Avenue South, MLK, Jr. Way, and other major arterial streets), poorly maintained streets and sidewalks, and necessary improvements to pedestrian/bicycle routes and facilities.
- *Traffic Congestion and Parking Needs.* Addressing traffic congestion and parking needs.

1995 Metro Six-Year Plan

The I-90 station areas are located at the I-90/Rainier Avenue South intersection, which functions as important bus transfer station. King County’s *1995 Six-Year Transit Development Plan* designates the I-90/Rainier Avenue South intersection as one of 44 transit hubs throughout the Seattle region. As such, it is targeted for service and facility improvements, depending on service routes and transit frequencies (Strategy C-1).

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE NETWORK

The massive I-90 structure presents a visual barrier in the station areas, and Rainier Avenue South is not a pedestrian-oriented street. However, the generous sidewalks and ability to make transit connections beneath the I-90 structure assist pedestrian movement. Accessible bike trails in the station areas provide a link from downtown Seattle to Lake Washington and beyond. The key opportunity for the I-90 light rail station (under either option) is the potential for multi-modal transit connections – auto, bus, and rail.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The *North Rainier Neighborhood Planning Report Phase I* cites open space as a major concern for the community. The Plan calls for upgrading existing parks with improved lighting and maintenance, developing pocket parks and P-Patches throughout the neighborhood, and expanding schools as community facilities.

URBAN DESIGN FEATURES

Rainier Avenue South is the major north-south street in the I-90 station area. Interstate 90, a major east-west highway with entrances and exits located at its intersection with Rainier Avenue, divides the station area. The northern portion of the station area is characterized by commercial and light industrial uses along Rainier Avenue with residential areas to the east and approaches toward Downtown to the west. The southern portion is characterized by commercial uses along Rainier Avenue and stable residential areas with many new infill housing projects to the east and west. The /I-90 Station area is zoned for auto-oriented commercial development along Rainier Avenue, and for residential uses in other areas.

RECENT MARKET TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

MARKET CONDITIONS

The optional I-90 station areas have relatively low rents for residential development and vacancy rates of approximately 6%, suggesting that there is low-rent housing available. However, recent trends in land prices suggest that housing prices and rents are increasing rapidly. While the area may be relatively affordable for housing, its affordability is attracting new residents and, therefore, increasing the value of properties. Although permit records show some market activity, there has been little commercial development overall in the station area.

RECENT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Little development has occurred recently in the I-90 station areas, with the exception of a small 9,000 square-foot commercial project in the Rainier Avenue station area. The key redevelopment opportunities in the I-90 station area are for infill commercial or mixed use projects along Rainier Avenue South at the station location. Many opportunities also exist for infill housing in adjacent neighborhoods.

RELATIVE STRENGTH OF DEVELOPMENT MARKETS IN THE I-90 STATION AREAS

Overall development potential for the I-90 station areas is low. Low rents, residential vacancies of 6%, and slow commercial development suggest that the area does not have a strong market for residential or commercial development. Retail has slightly greater potential be-

cause the presence of existing uses will attract customers that may also be able to support some additional retail uses.

I-90 Station Areas – Market Conditions¹		
	<i>Rainier Avenue</i>	<i>South of I-90</i>
Rents and Vacancy Rates		
Apartment Rents (sq. ft.)	0.71	0.71
Apartment Vacancy Rate	6.0%	6.0%
Office Rents (sq. ft.)	N/A	N/A
Office Vacancy Rate	N/A	N/A
Trends in Land Prices²		
Commercial Lots	4.7%	4.7%
Single Family Lots	7.3%	7.3%
Multi-family Lots	9.3%	9.3%
Active Permit Applications		
Housing Units	0	0
Commercial Space (sq. ft.)	9,000	0
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
² 1985-95 average annual increase, based on sales prices recorded by King County Assessor and reported by zone category.		

EXISTING PLANS AND ZONING

PLANNING CONTEXT

The Interstate 90 station area is located at the I-90/Rainier Avenue overcrossing between the 23rd and Jackson-Union Residential Urban Village to the north and the Rainier/I-90 Hub Urban Village to the south. The largest single use in the station area is I-90 right-of-way. The area to the northeast is predominantly occupied by low-density residential uses. The area to the southwest is also primarily occupied by low-density residential uses and a mix of commercial and industrial uses along Rainier Avenue South.

I-90 Station Areas – Relative Market Strength¹	
	Ranking (5 high, 1 low)
Housing	1
Retail	2
Office	1
¹ Indicates relative strength of market type of station area, compared to other potential station areas. Ranking is based on rents, employment levels, vacancy rates, land values, recent development activity, stakeholder interviews, field observations, and other information.	

ZONING

Because the I-90 right-of-way bisects the optional I-90 station areas, zoning provisions for areas north and south of the highway are not integrated. Parcels near the highway are zoned for higher density uses to concentrate these uses near the high-intensity transportation corridor. Lower density residential uses are located farther away from the highway. Zoning in the area includes:

- *Commercial Areas.* Parcels along Rainier Avenue South, south of I-90, are zoned for a variety of commercial uses, including auto-oriented uses. Commercial zones allow for larger scale development that is more oriented to automobile travel than pedestrian access.
- *Multi-family Areas.* Low-rise multi-family residential uses are located behind commercial areas on Rainier Avenue South, as well as south of the I-90 right-of-way. These uses hug the highway right-of-way, focusing more intensive development around the corridor.
- *Single-family Areas.* Single-family 5000 zones are found behind the low-rise multi-family districts clustered in the vicinity of the highway.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN ISSUES

The *North Rainier Neighborhood Planning Report* lists several urban design issues relevant to the area, including graffiti and litter control, the prevalence of strip malls, lack of open and green spaces, deteriorated public buildings, and the need for street trees along Rainier Avenue and MLK, Jr. Way.

The *Plan* seeks the following: to adopt specific neighborhood design guidelines and review standards; increase Good Neighbor funds for facade improvements; establish an Adopt-a-Street program; create a neighborhood cleanup program; publicize successful projects to dispel negative images; and link Mt. Baker Boulevard, Cheasty Boulevard, and greenbelt via a ground-based connection across Rainier and MLK, Jr. Way.

Visual Landmarks

The most prominent visual landmark in the station areas is Interstate 90. The negative impact of the structure has been mitigated, in part, by significant landscaping adjacent to the highway structure.

Views

Mount Rainier is visible from locations in the station areas, particularly along Rainier Avenue South.

I-90 Station Areas – Potential Development Under Current Zoning Regulations¹		
	<i>Rainier Avenue</i>	<i>South of I-90</i>
Residential (units)		
Existing Development	357	473
Additional Potential Development under Current Zoning Regulations ²	861	1,081
TOTAL	1,218	1,554
Commercial (sq. ft.)		
Existing Development	326,134	415,701
Additional Potential Development under Current Zoning Regulations ²	440,617	535,578
TOTAL	766,751	951,279
¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of station location.		
² Potential development capacity is based on City of Seattle GIS database and Scenario 2 in the “Zoned Development Capacity” background paper.		

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

Neighborhood planning has clearly identified integrating the neighborhood plan with light rail as a key goal. Stakeholders are particularly concerned with station access, neighborhood image, and creation of public spaces and community facilities around the light rail station. Comments by stakeholders include the following:

- *Increased Residential Density.* “I favor more density. The neighborhood is very underdeveloped.” “Three to four story housing would be appropriate. Greater density is needed to support retail and other new businesses.”
- *Pedestrian Network.* “We need infrastructure remediation to accommodate pedestrians in the station area.” “Improving sidewalks should be the highest priority.”

STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

AVAILABLE OPPORTUNITY SITES

Together, the two station area options have 127 parcels comprising approximately 16 acres of land available for development. These represent vacant and underutilized parcels.

Zoning for Opportunity Sites

Nearly all opportunity sites in the I-90 station areas are found in L1, L2 and LDT zones, which allow for low-rise multi-family residential development (or duplex-triplex development in the LDT zone). These residential areas are within walking distance of the optional

station sites. Nearly four acres of opportunity sites are located in the C commercial zone and offer the potential for transit-supportive commercial development and housing.

I-90 Station Areas – Opportunity Sites by Zoning Designation¹		
	<i>Parcels</i>	<i>Acreage²</i>
SF 5000	10	1.84
L-1	37	4.27
LDT	13	1.42
L-2	38	4.12
CI-65	6	1.05
CI-40	23	2.88
TOTAL	127	15.58
¹ Within the combined area within a ¼-mile radius of both station locations.		
² Based on City of Seattle GIS database.		

DEVELOPMENT CONSTRAINTS

Major constraints to development in the I-90 station area options related mostly to the existing site configuration. I-90 and Rainier Avenue South both carry heavy traffic, and any development in their vicinity will have to cope with the negative impacts of noise, fumes, and traffic congestion.

Another potential constraint is the small size of residential and commercial land parcels (most in the range of 0.10 to 0.13 acres). It is uncertain whether the local real estate market can support small-scale infill development.

Existing zoning constrains the potential for transit-supportive development. Although the C zone permits mixed use, multi-family residential zones do not. Moreover, the commercial districts tend to favor large-scale, auto-oriented development. Potential development, therefore, will not be likely to create improved conditions for pedestrian activity in the station area.

STATION AREA FORECASTS

Three different forecasts were developed for the new population, employment, dwelling units, and commercial floor area that will be added to the station area by 2020:

1. “Without light rail transit;”
2. “With light rail transit, but without supportive land use policies;” and
3. “With both light rail transit *and* supportive land use policies.”

POPULATION AND HOUSING

The PSRC and *Comprehensive Plan* Extrapolation forecasts are similar, projecting an additional 200 to 250 units in the optional I-90 station areas. Current demand for housing in this area is relatively weak because the center of the station area is dominated by Interstate 90 and Rainier Avenue. At the perimeter of each optional station area (to the north in the International District and to the south on Beacon Hill) are residential areas with half of the housing stock developed as multifamily housing. The baseline forecast averages the two forecasts, projecting 190 and 240 units “without rail”. With “light rail only,” new dwelling units are expected to increase to 200 and 250, bringing an additional 300 to 375 people into the station area.

EMPLOYMENT AND COMMERCIAL FLOOR AREA

Since the City and PSRC forecasts are very similar in their estimates of new commercial floor area over the next 20 years, the mid-points of 140,000 and 170,000 square feet of commercial space for the two station areas was selected.

LAND USE IMPACT OF LIGHT RAIL

The land use impacts of “rail without supportive policies” will likely be an increase in housing and commercial uses in the I-90 station area on the order of 5%. This new development is unlikely to cluster around the light rail station because of the proximity to Interstate 90.

LAND USE IMPACT OF LIGHT RAIL WITH SUPPORTIVE POLICIES

The potential development strategies for the I-90 station area focus on providing incentives in the zoning code for mixed-use transit oriented development and improving linkages to adjacent neighborhoods. Because of the station’s proximity to I-90, the development strategies must focus on the opportunity sites along Rainier Avenue. With some financial assistance, these sites could be redeveloped to provide housing and retail services. Targeted development policies could boost the number of new dwelling units by 50 units and the new commercial floor area by 20% from the “rail only” forecast.

POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The overall approach for the I-90 station area is to ensure that new development is supportive of transit and pedestrian activity. However, the area is not seen as being able to accommodate high-density commercial or residential development, primarily because the sites are dominated by I-90 and are of a small-scale. However, existing commercial and residential structures, as well as infill development, can be regulated to optimize transit and pedestrian use. The overall development strategy for the I-90 station areas can be summarized as follows:

*Background Report for Light Rail Station Area Planning in Seattle:
Existing Conditions and Future Prospects for Transit-Oriented Development*

I-90 Station Area Options – Market Forecasts, 2020¹						
	<i>Rainier Avenue</i>			<i>South of I-90</i>		
	<i>Without LRT</i>	<i>With LRT Only</i>	<i>LRT & Supportive Policies</i>	<i>Without LRT</i>	<i>With LRT Only</i>	<i>LRT & Supportive Policies</i>
Population	1,166	1,181	1,256	1,482	1,497	1,572
Dwelling Units	547	557	607	713	723	773
Employment	1,254	1,274	1,384	1,340	1,370	1,370
Commercial Floor Area ²	466	473	506	586	594	596

¹ Within a ¼-mile radius of the station location.

² Square footage (in thousands); includes commercial, industrial and institutional space, but excludes Sound Transit facilities and public facilities.

- *Pedestrian Environment.* The station area can be made more supportive of pedestrians. Rezoning to NC on select sites would encourage small-scale commercial development with better pedestrian connections and facilities. Implementation of a POZ would also create a conducive pedestrian environment and would limit auto-oriented uses to provide greater opportunities for pedestrian-oriented development. Linkages to adjacent communities can be improved as well.
- *Urban Design.* Buffering and design standards, as in the L-3 zoning district, can better protect residential areas from commercial areas along Rainier Avenue South.
- *Parking Management.* Reduced parking standards along Rainier Avenue South and implementation of an RPZ in residential areas can help control the supply of parking and encourage the use of alternative modes of travel, including light rail. In conjunction with improved transit service, parking management can help change travel patterns to and from the neighborhood in the long run.

The table on the next page shows high-priority and recommended actions for the I-90 station area. Work with a local Community Development Corporation may help coordinate efforts to protect affordable housing opportunities and local businesses. It is uncertain whether development partnerships or pilot projects, possibly involving a CDC or local businesses, would be feasible or desirable in this station area.

Potential Development Strategies: I-90 (21, 28)

Strategy	Potential Action	Comments
Land Use Tools	○	Rezone L-1 and L2 adjacent to Rainier to L3, subject to buffering and design standards (+33% to +75% in number of units). Consider POZ and NC zoning on selected opportunity sites along Rainier Avenue. Establish limitations on auto-oriented uses and provide for live-work in NC3 zones.
Pedestrian Network	●	Improve linkages to adjacent neighborhoods
Parking Management	●	Reduce standards for uses along Rainier Avenue; establish residential parking zone in neighborhoods south of station.
Economics/Financial Assistance	○	Establish CDC (and/or support SEED) to help finance affordable housing and local businesses.
Regulatory Process	?	Provide expedited review/SEPA clearance for TOD projects.
Local Transit Service	○	Develop local service for neighborhood and station accessibility.
Development Partnerships	?	Further planning needed.
Pilot Projects	?	Further planning needed.

- ✓ = Supportive Policy/Program in Place
 ● = High Priority Action
 ○ = Recommended Action
 ? = Further Study Required

- TOD = Transit-Oriented Development
 POZ = Pedestrian Overlay Zone
 RPZ = Residential Parking Zone

